Self-guided tour
Central area campus and surrounding area

A warm welcome to the University of Edinburgh and the city of Edinburgh. The University has a number of sites within the city – this tour is for the Central area campus.

Any prospective student of our University will find this tour useful as it is located near the Main Library, Students’ Association, Pleasance Sport Centre & Gym and a range of study spaces and other services that are open to all students at the University. Walking at a leisurely pace with time to take in Edinburgh’s unique atmosphere and architecture, the tour should take no more than an hour. If you wish to extend the tour to include High School Yards, the Pleasance and Moray House School of Education, add approximately 30 minutes.

Look out for the various plaques around the University, which have been erected to commemorate the achievements of individuals who have been associated with the University through our 400 years. A map showing accessible routes and entrances can be downloaded from: www.ed.ac.uk/estates/buildings-information/disability

1 33 Buccleuch Place
Built in 1766, Buccleuch Place is today home to various teaching, research and support departments, including the School of Economics and Asian Studies. Turn right from the office, cross the access road, then walk up the steps on your right.

2 40 George Square & Lecture Theatres
40 George Square is currently being refurbished, with the basement as one of the first areas to be completed. It boasts new teaching rooms, a shop, copy centre, and study spaces; feel free to take a look by entering via the glass box on George Square. The three lecture theatres behind 40 George Square are where many 1st and 2nd year lectures take place.
standing with your back to the entrance of the glass box, to your left is the University of Edinburgh Business School. The building houses high quality teaching space for Business and Accounting students, and ‘The Exchange’ café.

Continue along George Square.

The next building on your left is the University’s largest lecture theatre: Gordon Lecture Theatre. Built in 1967, the theatre is used for teaching by a variety of subjects and is also used as a venue during the Fringe, the world’s largest Arts festival which takes place in Edinburgh each August.

Gordon Aikman Lecture Theatre

One of the largest academic libraries in the world, the Main Library is home to over 3.5 million books and 500,000 ebooks. Founded in 1580, the library moved to George Square in 1967, and has recently undergone a £60 million refurbishment. Facilities include group study pods, computer suites, and café. Located on the 3rd Floor, the Student Counselling, Careers and Disability Services provide advice and support for students on a range of matters all under one roof. Continue around the south west corner of George Square.

Main Library

As you walk past the Library, take a look to your left, you will see the Meadows, a green and leafy space popular with students. At number 19 you will pass the home of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies and at number 25, you will find the Catholic Chaplaincy, which was once the boyhood home of Sir Walter Scott.

The west side of George Square

At the NW corner is the Crystal Macmillan Building, home of the School of Social and Political Science. Crystal Macmillan (1872-1937) was among the first women to graduate from the University and was the first female science graduate. Continue walking around the square.

The Crystal Macmillan Building

Built in 1978 and named after the then University Principal, today this building is used largely for biological Science teaching, whilst a 24-hour computer lab house over 200 computers. Opposite this building is the main entrance to George Square Gardens. Over summer the gardens are a well-known festival venue with vibrant open-air café-bars and a range of performances.

The Hugh Robson Building

Built in 1876, this was once George Watson’s Ladies’ College and was purchased by the University in 1973. Today the building is home to Psychology. Outside you will see the plaques for Robert Louis Stevenson: alumnus of the University, poet, and author; and Julius Kambarage Nyerere: graduate of the University, African statesman, and first President of Tanzania.

7 George Square

57 George Square is home to the office for the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Science. Outside is the plaque for Benjamin Rush, who was a Signatory of the American Declaration of Independence, and below this plaque you will find the George Square was built by James Brown in 1766, as the first new development in a very overcrowded Old Town. Despite popular belief that George Square was so called after King George III, as is the case with Edinburgh’s George Street, the square is in fact named after the builder, James Brown’s elder brother George Brown. Mainly residential, it was considered a very fashionable place to live.

57 George Square

Walking towards the Business School - The first modern building on your left, opened in 2014 and is home to the School of Literatures, Languages & Cultures.

Turn around and return to the NE corner of George Square.

50 George Square

Located in the northeast corner of George Square, Appletown Tower was completed in 1966, the building is named after physicians Sir Edward Appleton. Recently renovated with teaching space used by a variety of subjects, as well as a café, computer labs, and social spaces.

Appleton Tower

Designed by Bennetts Associates, the Informatics Forum has won numerous awards for its environmentally sustainable design and is used purely for research. Turn right onto Charles Street to pass the University’s Visitors Centre, and the Dugald Stewart Building, which houses the School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences. This space provides a state-of-the-art centre for innovation and interaction, cutting edge technology and flexible teaching space.

Informatics Forum & Dugald Stewart Building

On your left is Teviot Row House, the oldest purpose built Students’ Union in the world, opened in 1889. The building is now run by Edinburgh University Students’ Association, and boasts five bars, a debating chamber, dining room, refectory and several meeting rooms. Often referred to as ‘ Hogwarts’ by tourists: feel free to go in.

Teviot Row House

Leaving Teviot Row House, the large circular building on your left is McEwan Hall, financed by Sir William McEwan, MP for Central Edinburgh and founder of the famous city brewery. Once Edinburgh’s premier concert venue, McEwan Hall has recently been redeveloped and normally hosts graduation ceremonies and exams. Designed by Sir Robert Rowand Anderson, and completed in 1897, the interior was designed by William Palin with the images decorating the ceiling representing the various subjects offered by the University.

McEwan Hall

On the opposite side of Bristo Square is Potterrow, another of the four Students’ Association buildings and a lively and popular place to meet friends. Go in and see the student facilities for yourself, which include a bank, a shop, a café, a bar, a music centre, and an information centre, which offers support for students of all faiths and none. Potterrow is also home to The Venue which hosts numerous themed nights throughout the year including gigs, ceilidhs, and a student club night called Big Cheese. Next to Potterrow is the Richard Verney Health Centre.

Potterrow Student Centre

Exit Potterrow by the main door and turn right. Follow the railing and continue through the underpass and go along West College Street to enter Old College via the arch on your right.

Old College

On your right you will pass the Talbot Rice Gallery, and as you enter the quadrangle, turn left and follow the walkway around the courtyard and look for the plaque commemorating the University’s first female graduate in 1812: James Miranda Barry, (c.1795-1865). She was an army surgeon and Inspector General of Hospitals in Canada, who lived as a man. Old College is the University of Edinburgh’s oldest existing site, and is normally hosts graduation ceremonies and exams. Designed by Sir Robert Rowand Anderson, and completed in 1897, the interior was designed by William Palin with the images decorating the ceiling representing the various subjects offered by the University.

This concludes the main self-guided tour. From the archway of Old College you are a 10 minute walk from Princes Street, and Waverley Train Station, however time permitting, we recommend extending your tour to include the following optional University sights. Upon exiting Old College turn right, and then left onto Drummond Street. Continue to the end of Drummond Street and cross the road at the pedestrian lights.

The Pleasance / Pleasance Sport Centre & Gym

You will see the Pleasance Sport Centre and Gym straight ahead of you, which has undergone a £4.8 million extension and refurbishment. If you turn right, slightly further up, you will find the Pleasance complex on your left. Built by Alexander Paterson and Thomas Dott in 1719, it is used by the Students’ Association, as well as being a prominent venue during the Fringe. Recently redeveloped, the building has various multipurpose spaces as well as a theatre and bar. Leaving the Pleasance by the main entrance, turn right, back down the hill, until you reach the crossroads at the bottom. Turn right and continue down Holyrood Road.

St Leonard’s Land / Moray House

On your right you will see St Leonard’s Land, which houses Physical Education and the University swimming pool. Directly across the road is Moray House School of Education. Further along Holyrood Road, there is the Scottish Parliament, Holyrood Palace and Holyrood Park.

Chambers Street

Adam House, on the north side of Chambers Street, is a modernistic neo-classical building built 1955, and thought to be named after architect Robert Adam. Today it is used for matriculation, exams and theatre productions. As you continue to walk along you will pass Minto House, home to Architectural Studies and History of Art, and the National Museum of Scotland. Turn left at the top of Chambers Street.

Bedlam Theatre

In front of you, where the road splits, you will see the Bedlam Theatre. The former North Free Church was designed by architect Thomas Hamilton and built in 1846. In 1941 the church closed and the building is now home to the University of Edinburgh Theatre Company, showing over 40 productions every year. The name Bedlam is attributed to the building’s proximity to Edinburgh’s first mental health hospital. Take the right hand fork onto Forrest Road, and continue to the traffic lights at the end. Cross to the left, down Teviot Place. On your right walk through a large archway with iron gates.

William Robertson Wing / Old Medical School and Nursing

Originally part of the Medical School this Grade A listed building has been refurbished to unite the School of History, Classics and Archaeology under one roof. The building is named after William Robertson (1721-1793), who studied Medicine at the University and was appointed to the role of University Principal in 1762. Staying in the quadrangle, the Old Medical School is on your left hand side. You can find the Anatomy Lecture Theatre here; which is still used for 1st and 2nd year Medicine lectures. Nursing is also taught in this building. The School of Medicine was given formal recognition in 1726 and has since developed an impressive international reputation for both teaching and research. The Old Medical School where you now stand was completed in 1886. The 1880s were known as the ‘body dead’ decade by the medical establishment. Bodies were illegally sold to the science of anatomy. A secret tunnel between College Wynd and the University’s anatomy theatre was used to deliver dead bodies for dissection. In the 1820s, William Burke and his partners were convicted of an infamous series of murders to sell the bodies to Robert Knox’s School of Anatomy. The pair were finally caught in 1828. Burke was tried and hanged, but Hare was released and never heard of again. Today’s state-of-the-art teaching and research facilities for the School of Medicine are located at the Royal Infirmary, Little France.